



# Senator Linda Evans Parlette

## 2012 Legislative Review

12TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

May 2012

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2012 legislative session was perhaps the most challenging one we have faced during my time as a legislator. Reaching agreement on a plan to close the deficit of around \$1 billion in the state's operating budget required an additional 31 days of "special legislative session." During the latter part of the special session I was wearing three hats: caucus chair, capital budget leader and acting caucus leader while Sen. Mike Hewitt was out for surgery.

While I would have preferred to have adopted a budget in the 60-day regular session, it was even more important we get it "right." To me, getting it right means a budget that is both sustainable and reflective of our core principles of government – education, public safety and protecting our state's most vulnerable residents. I'm proud of the budget solution we ultimately arrived at and although I would have preferred more funds to have been left in reserve, I am hopeful that it will help address short-term needs while putting the state on more stable long-term fiscal footing.

There are many items I didn't have space to cover in this newsletter. If you have questions about other issues, please contact my office and we will answer them for you. Due to election year communication rules, I will no longer be able to send general e-mail updates until after the election. If there is specific information you need, contact me and we will send it along.

Thanks to all of you who have e-mailed, written, and called me over the past few months about issues that are important to you. I hope you will continue to share your ideas for how to handle the challenges facing our state. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your state senator. I am honored to represent you.

With warm regards,

Linda Evans Parlette  
Washington State Senator  
12th Legislative District

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Republican Caucus Chair

**Senate standing committees:**

- Health and Long-Term Care
- Rules
- Ways and Means
- Ranking senator, capital budget

### The 12th Legislative District will be changing!

Every 10 years following the national Census, states update their legislative and congressional district boundaries. As a result of this process, the boundaries of the 12th Legislative District will be changing in November. You may view the new boundaries at [www.redistricting.wa.gov](http://www.redistricting.wa.gov). We will also include a map of the new 12th Legislative District in next year's government guide.

## Pursuing a more sustainable operating budget

On March 3, in a historic move, a bipartisan group of senators came together in support of a budget proposal written by the minority party that included reforms and kept spending within the amount of available revenues. This was the only budget plan in the Senate that had the 25 votes necessary to get the process moving. The biggest debate was over whether to accept a House proposal to skip a \$330 million payment to schools in June 2013 with no firm commitment to make it up – a policy the bipartisan Senate

coalition pointed out would result in a \$2 billion deficit next year, putting even more state services at risk.

Negotiations toward creating a sustainable budget continued into a special session, which began March 12 and ended on April 11. One of the most important things to many of my colleagues and I was advocating for “reforms before revenue” – in other words, look to long-term structural reforms first before even looking to new revenue sources. The go-home budget was a package that included several major reforms.

## Policy reforms take center stage in budget talks

- State budgets – taking a longer view. Senate Bill 6636** will require the state to balance its operating budget over a four-year period, rather than the current two-year model. This will provide more stability, predictability and transparency in state budgeting. It will also prevent future legislatures from adopting budgeting tactics that create built-in debt, such as pushing today’s payments into the next biennium. Washington will be the first state in the nation to have this type of four-year budgeting outlook.
- Addressing our long-term pension liabilities. Senate Bill 6378** is a landmark pension reform measure that will save public employers and taxpayers \$1.3 billion over the next 25 years. Under the measure, future state employees will still be able to retire early after 30 years of service, but at a reduced benefit of 5 percent per year before age 65. **This change will not affect any current state employees;** it applies only to future employees hired after May 2013.
- School employee health insurance reform.** There’s broad consensus that the state needs to be a smarter purchaser of health care. This is a challenge for our schools, with 295 districts each purchasing their own health care. **Senate Bill 5940** will allow teachers, classified staff, taxpayers and the Legislature to see how these health care dollars are being spent and it also directs us to look at ways we can make coverage costs more equitable. Originally, the bill brought all districts into one purchasing pool, an issue that was of concern to some. The final bill did not do that, but it did achieve a level of transparency that will help us make informed decisions on this issue in the future.
- Managing our state’s debt.** I have worked hard to educate my colleagues and the public about the important tie between the capital budget and the operating budget. State debt incurred through our capital budget is paid for within the operating budget—this is called “debt service”. Our state’s debt capacity is constitutionally limited to 9 percent of the average annual general state revenue collections for the previous three fiscal years. As a result of the work of last year’s State Debt Commission, I sponsored **Senate Joint Resolution 8221** to reduce our constitutional debt limit over time from 9 percent to 8 percent; also, instead of three-year averaging, the debt limit is applied to the average of general state revenues over the previous six fiscal years. This constitutional change will go before voters in November.



## The capital budget: Creating jobs with ready-to-go projects

I serve as the lead Senator for our caucus on the capital budget, and coming into the session, the budget negotiators had three primary goals for the 2012 supplemental budget: to invest in projects that are ready to go and will improve the curve of our state's economic recovery; start them now, while prices and interest rates are low; and make investments that will help ease the pressure on future operating budgets.

This budget contains slightly more than \$1 billion in projects, half of which were funded through bonds and half through cash. This includes \$320 million for higher education-related facilities, \$254 million for economic development and public infrastructure, \$170 million for energy efficiency, weatherization and housing, \$57 million for skills centers and more than \$200 million for stormwater, hatcheries, parks, forest health and other natural-resource projects.

Some of the projects in North Central Washington funded through the supplemental capital budget include:

- \$19.4 million for the expansion of the branch campus of the Wenatchee Valley Skills Center in Moses Lake;
- \$17 million to construct a new school for the Grand Coulee Dam School District;
- \$9.5 million for a remodel of the Wenatchee Valley Skills Center;
- \$1.5 million for cleanup of the 32-acre Cashmere Mill site, which is being reclaimed and restored with the goal of development as an industrial park;
- \$1.3 million for Department of Fish & Wildlife minor works projects, including Perrygin Lake Access Ram; Bridge 1 Access Site Development in the Methow; and Bridgeport Access Site Development;
- \$1.2 million for farmworker housing in the Bridgeport area;
- \$1 million to consolidate water systems in rural Douglas County;
- \$975,000 for the City of Wenatchee design and retrofitting of the Wenatchee snowmelt facility;
- \$637,000 for the Women's Resource Center at NCW Parkside Redevelopment;
- \$400,000 for Rocky Reach trail between the Oda-bashian Bridge and Lincoln Rock State Park; and
- \$165,000 for stormwater collection, conveyance and treatment facilities on 23th Street NE between Baker Avenue and State Route 28 to address recurrent flooding and erosion issues.

## Funding for Grand Coulee Dam School

Last year I secured \$14 million through the state's school-construction account for a portion of what's needed to build a new K-12 school in the Grand Coulee Dam District, whose facilities are more than a half-century old and in serious need of replacement. Those funds, however, were contingent upon obtaining matching local funds.

The school district requested the matching funds from the federal government because it is impossible for the district to fund the necessary capital improvements to its facilities through property taxes alone. That's primarily due to the abundance of state- and federally-owned land in the district. The federal government has not yet provided the funds, nor has it put in place a long-term funding plan to assist the district.

This year I was pleased to be able to secure another \$17 million in the capital budget through the distressed schools' account for the new K-12 school. These funds will be considered the matching local funds, giving the school district the money it needs to

build the \$31 million K-12 structure, which is part of a \$46 million total campus design.

This is a dream the Coulee-area community has been working toward for a long time. I will continue to advocate for a long-term funding plan for this school district that includes funds from the federal government, which has a vested interest in the Grand Coulee Dam and therefore should also uphold its responsibility to the residents and families who reside in the community it established.



*A rendering of the proposed K-12 school*



## Bills on citizens' minds

Here are three of the major bills you contacted me about this year:

- Changes to the Discover Pass.** In 2011 the Legislature approved a measure creating the Discover Pass to help fund state parks. Last summer many citizens expressed concerns over the inability to transfer passes from one vehicle to another. This session the Legislature passed **House Bill 2373**, which immediately allows passes to be transferred between two vehicles and creates a new "family pass" that can be transferred among any number of vehicles for \$50.
- Same-sex marriage. Senate Bill 6239** would legalize same-sex marriage in Washington unless sufficient signatures are collected for a referendum proposed by opponents of the bill. Supporters of Referendum 74 have until June 6 to collect and submit the required number of valid signatures to put the issue on the November ballot.
- Teacher/principal evaluations. Senate Bill 5985** uses improvement in student test scores as a factor in personnel decisions for teachers starting in the 2015-16 school year. It also sets new guidelines for principals, including a requirement to use teacher feedback in their evaluations.

## Creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities

This year I sponsored **Senate Bill 6384**, a measure that will help people with disabilities find and retain jobs. In order to maintain federal matching dollars for supported employment programs, our state must continue in the same direction as the federal government, which is employment-focused. SB 6384 will accomplish this goal by requiring that individuals 21 and older be enrolled in employment for nine months, at which point they would be offered the choice of transitioning to community access programs.

This was one of the most important and meaningful pieces of legislation I've had the opportunity to sponsor during my time in the Legislature.



*Bill signing ceremony for SB 6384*